

Working from Home? What You Need to Know

Whether you love it or dread it, a lot of people find themselves working from home for the foreseeable future. Here are some questions and tips to help you make the transition and find a new, productive and healthy way to work from home!

Create the Right Space

Start by answering these questions:

- Where could I set up a space to work?
 - If the answer isn't obvious, you may need to get creative and think about ways to convert an area that might be devoted to something else.
 - Resist the urge to work from the couch or a space that may not allow the focus or privacy you need or that may not be comfortable after long hours of using a computer.
 - Be flexible – try out different areas and see what works and what doesn't.
- What type of environment is best for me?
 - Do I need a quiet area to work on projects, take phone calls, or limit distractions, such as a separate room with a door?
 - Do I prefer working in a more open space?
 - How much natural light do I need or prefer?
- Will I be doing video conferencing?
 - If yes, take the time to see what your colleagues (and perhaps customers) see from your video camera. Even if you can't work from an ideal spot at all times, look for a place where you can conduct video calls/meetings.
- Once you have your space:
 - Stock your space with the tools you'll need (office supplies, notes and materials, etc.).
 - Get up and move throughout the day to stretch and limit fatigue.

Build a Routine

Working in an office usually means starting the day with some sort of routine and a commute. You may be surprised at the value of maintaining at least some of these routines as you work from home.

Keeping a routine helps keep your mind in "work mode" vs. "home mode."

- Keep or create a pre-work routine. It might include some of the things you did before heading out the door, such as a workout, a walk, a cup of coffee, reading, or listening to a favorite radio show.
- With the time saved not commuting, it can be tempting to sleep in. If you are an early riser, continue to get up early to start your day.
- Avoid the temptation to work in what you wore to bed. Decide what your own work-from-home "dress code" is to help you get into a "ready to work" mindset.

- If your commute helped you focus or unwind before or after work, no need to skip it. Go for a walk, bike ride, or drive before or after work, even though you'll be ending up back at home to work!
- Create a schedule – if possible – for when you start work, take lunch, take a break, and when you end your work day. Working from home blurs many of these traditional breakpoints since you no longer have everyone around you as a reminder it's time for lunch.
- Create a plan and objectives or a "to-do" list for the day to help you stay on task.

Set Expectations – for your job and yourself

This is a great time to stay in touch with your manager. Have open discussions to align on expectations and if/how they will differ when working remotely versus in the office. For example:

- Are there certain hours or times that you need to be available or is there some flexibility?
- How will productivity and performance be measured and evaluated?
- How will you stay in touch with your manager and/or teammates?
- What goals and objectives do you need to be focused on this week or month? Will you be focused on different projects or work when working remotely vs. in the office?
- Don't try to solve everything via email or instant messaging. Pick up the phone!
- Give yourself permission to take breaks and recharge. When you're used to working in an office where coworkers stop by, you walk down the hall, and you tend to naturally move around throughout the day, remote work may feel more focused and intense. Check in on yourself every 30 to 60 minutes. How is your body feeling? Time to stand up, stretch, walk around? How is your energy level? Need to switch gears for a few minutes? Drink some water? Step outside for 10 minutes?
- Go easy on yourself and be open. Experiment with what works best. Pay attention to your thoughts and emotions. Reach out to your manager if you're struggling and make time to connect with coworkers.

Conference Call Tips/Etiquette

- Headsets are ideal and preferred over speakerphone.
- Go on mute unless you're speaking.
- When/if possible, share screens to show an agenda, a working document, or some visual to keep everyone focused.
- If conference calls are new to a team, leave space for people to speak up; encourage questions and interaction by using tools such as "polls" available in many conference applications.
- It's going to happen - check the mute button at least three times before using the bathroom while on a call!

Seek Technical Support When Needed

Working from home may come with the need to use new tools such as collaboration software or video conferencing.

- Keep your company's IT or helpdesk contact information ready in case you need technical support.
- Be mindful of any requirements or policies related to data security.
- Ask about training for new tools or processes. Are there videos or online tutorials available? This may be a great time to expand your skills and learn something new.

Set Boundaries

Living and working under the same roof can offer great flexibility, as well as some challenges. Setting healthy boundaries can help you manage the balance between work and home life.

- If you have family members who are not used to you working from home, have open discussions with them about expectations when you are working. How will they know if or when it's okay to ask for your attention?
- If your spouse, partner or roommate is also working from home, have a discussion about the areas in the home that you would like to designate as workspaces before you make each other crazy. You might also discuss things like business hours, talking volume, and if you like to work in quiet or prefer background noise.
- If you have young children home from school or daycare, what activities could they do while you're working? Do you have a spouse or family member who could help with caring for them? Can you invest in a babysitter or nanny to help you out? This might also help someone who is out of work right now and could use the money. What type of flexibility do you have or could you ask for with your schedule to help you deal with children at home?
- Create a separation between work life and home life. Don't turn on the TV; ignore the voice in your head to clean out the closet. What some might find even harder, is to stop working so it doesn't consume the entire day. If needed, create an artificial boundary, such as turning off your computer, saying "I'm done" out loud, or turning off the lights and closing your door (if you are working in a separate space). Ask your manager for support.
- Watch out for those "work from home traps" like – all day snacking, getting caught up in social media, forgetting to shower or even brush your teeth for days, and the temptation to shop online.
- Don't let working from home feel like a prison. You might feel more pressure to respond quickly to emails or prove that you are working. Know that it's okay to take breaks, go for a walk, step away to have lunch.

Communicate and Stay in Touch

The social aspect of work and staying connected with co-workers is more important than ever when working from home. Technology may help you stay connected, whether it's instant messaging, collaboration software, or the phone. If your day normally includes a periodic chat with an office friend, schedule a few minutes to catch up by phone. Stay in touch with your team and manager so you're all aligned as projects and situations change. During this time of uncertainty, working from home is a great option to have, and staying connected with each other is more important than ever.